THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes.

(b) and (c) Government have been closely monitoring the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip. The matter has been the subject of an exchange of notes between the Foreign Minister of Egypt and the Minister of External Affairs. Government have also issued statements on the matter on January 18, 2008, February 11, 2008, March 1, 2008 and March 7, 2008. The subject was also touched upon in the *suo motu* statement of the Minister of External Affairs made in both Houses of Parliament on March 3, 2008. In the statements, Government have condemned the escalation of violence on all sides, urged restraint and expressed India's readiness to assist, including on the humanitarian aspects, in order to relieve the sufferings of the Palestinian people. Government remain engaged on the subject.

Indian workers in Dubai jail

1464. DR. M.A.M. RAMASWAMY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Central Government is aware that 45 Indian workers who protested against low salaries have been jailed by a Dubai Court;

(b) if so, the facts of the matter; and

(c) the steps taken by the Central Government for the release of these Indian workers from jail?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) 42 Indian workers who were involved in violence during a strike in November 2007 were arrested by the police and charged with breaching local laws. The Dubai court of first instance sentenced them on 21/02/2008 for 6 months in jail followed by deportation for engaging in violence during a labour strike.

(c) Indian Consulate officials visited the Dubai central jail on 26/02/08 and interacted with some of the 42 Indian workers about their conditions in jail as well as any legal assistance required by them to go on appeal against the judgment. The workers informed that their living conditions in jail were good and that they have confessed in court about damaging the properties of the company during the strike and protest. The workers conveyed that after standard remission, their sentence period would be getting over by March 2008 and they would like to return to India.

Crisis in Gaza Strip

1465. SHRI AMAR SINGH:
SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn towards humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip on account of blockade of Gaza by Israel;